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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 003166

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TAGS: PGOV XF EUN IT

SUBJECT: ITALY QUINT MEETING "DAMAGE CONTROL"; ITALY SAYS SUPPORTS QUARTET

REF: SECSTATE 190259

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Classified By: DCM Anna M. Borg for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The DCM delivered reftel points to senior MFA officials November 22 and underscored our concern regarding the Spanish MEPP Initiative and Italy's association with it. The Italians said they see the Quint meeting, which Italy is hosting November 24, as an opportunity to do "damage control" after the premature and surprise Spanish announcement. They took pains to distance Italy from the so called Spanish-French MEPP initiative, while at the same time stressing Italy's desire to see concrete movement on the MEPP and support for the Quartet principles. They suggested that after thorough consultation first within the EU, then with the U.S. and finally with Israel and moderate Arabs that some aspects of the Spanish Initiative could be salvaged and might dovetail with the principles of the Quartet and the Roadmap. They agreed now is not the time for an international conference. End Summary.

¶2. (U) DCM and poloff delivered reftel demarche points to MFA Political Director Terzi and MFA Deputy DG for the Middle East Del Balzo in two separate meetings on November 22. Lucciano Pezzotti, MFA Near East Office Director accompanied Del Balzo. Brunella Borzi, OSCE Office Director accompanied Terzi.

¶3. (C) The DCM shared U.S. reftel concerns with Terzi and Del Balzo stressing that the Spanish initiative risks undermining the Quartet process. She expressed concern that Italy's offer to host the informal Quint meeting of the five (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK) Directors General for Middle Eastern Affairs appears to show Italian support for an initiative the Italians have taken pains to distance themselves from.

Italy Sees Quint Meeting as "Damage Control"; Do Not Want to undermine Quartet

¶4. (C) Both Del Balzo and Pezzotti underscored Italy's concerns with what they called the "Spanish" initiative. Pezzotti said the point of Friday's Quint meeting, and the need to advance the date, was in order to do what he termed "damage control" after the surprise Spanish announcement. Pezzotti stressed that Italy is not looking for any "outcomes" from the meeting.

¶5. (C) Del Balzo pointed to Prodi's statements distancing Italy from the initiative as evidence of their position. Del

Balzo said Italy does not want to undermine the Quartet in anyway. However, he pointed out that Italy as a major contributor to UNIFIL and as a Mediterranean country has a vested interest in developments in the region, and noted that the 'status quo' is unacceptable.

¶6. (C) Political Director Terzi stressed the utility of the Quint as a forum in which the five DGs for Middle Eastern affairs can discuss developments in the region. He said the sooner they can meet the better, as they clearly have differences of opinion which need to be discussed. Both Terzi and Del Balzo stressed that the Italians are sensitive to the need for any plan to have the endorsement of the full EU, the U.S., Israel and moderate Arabs in order to have any chance of success.

Italy, Spain, France: Likeminded, BUT...

¶7. (C) Pezzotti clearly stated "Foreign Minister D'Alema wants something concrete," not just another "useless piece of paper." Although Italy strongly disagrees with the tactics advocated by the Spanish, especially with their premature surprise announcement of the initiative, Terzi noted and Del Balzo underscored Italy's conviction that it is necessary to revive the peace process with some concrete progress. Pezzotti pointed out that the Italians agree with the U.S. that now is not the right time to hold an international conference, and they hope to be able to convince the Spanish as well. Terzi noted Italy remains absolutely determined to proceed with the goals of the Road Map in mind, and that its intention is to help move Europe as a whole toward those objectives.

PM Prodi Calls Olmert to Reassure Israel

¶8. (C) In response to the DCM's questioning the value of

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continuing to talk about the Spanish initiative if Israel had already rejected it, Del Balzo responded that PM Prodi had spoken to Israeli PM Olmert by telephone to reassure him of Italy's intentions not to undermine the Quartet.

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